




“Impact of meme marketing on consumer purchase intention: Examining the mediating role of consumer engagement”

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IMPACT OF MEME MARKETING ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION: EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Abstract

This paper analyzes an emerging form of social media marketing, meme marketing, which has gained attention for its ability to entertain and engage users. Marketers and companies are recognizing the value of using memes as a tool to connect with consumers. To understand the effects of meme marketing activities, this paper aims to examine the impact of meme marketing activities on consumer purchase intentions and concurrently assess the mediating role of consumer engagement. The study encompassed 452 Indian social media users with active social media accounts and familiarity with memes and meme marketing concepts. It employed a quantitative methodology backed by robust statistical techniques. The method used for analysis was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software. The results found that meme marketing activities have a direct and significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.257, p < 0.05$) on consumer purchase intentions. It further shows that meme marketing has a direct and significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.745, p < 0.05$) on consumer engagement. It shows that consumer engagement has a direct and significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.651, p < 0.05$) on consumer purchase intention. However, the indirect impact of meme marketing activities on consumer purchase intentions is also significant, resulting in partial mediation. The study findings hold value for marketing managers, agencies, and companies that interact and engage consumers with memes and undertake meme marketing activities.

Keywords

consumer engagement, marketing, memes, purchase intention, social media

JEL Classification

M30, M31, M37, M39

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of memes into the realm of social media marketing has greatly altered the landscape of consumer engagement and purchasing behaviors. Memes, often called Internet memes, represent a digital construct that can be readily disseminated across various social media platforms, facilitating the seamless transmission of information. Due to their inherent advantages in terms of accessibility and absence of financial burden, they have piqued the interest of managers and marketers on a global scale (Malodia et al., 2022). Subsequently, they have ushered in novel avenues for marketing practices and customer engagement, augmenting consumer involvement and exerting a discernible impact on purchasing proclivities and resulting in marketing through memes, also known as meme marketing (Razzaq et al., 2023).

The utilization of memes by companies on social media platforms has garnered increasing attention from their intended audience. According to Paquette (2019), the utilization of memes in marketing results in a 30% engagement rate on social media, a significant contrast to the 1%



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click-through rate (CTR) observed with Google AdWords. Social media channels, in particular, offer an ideal environment for disseminating memes as a marketing tool. These platforms enable rapid and efficient cross-border communication, effectively transcending geographical boundaries. This inherent characteristic makes them a promising arena for the practice of meme-based marketing (Dang et al., 2019).

Due to its widespread popularity among consumers, meme marketing holds significance in shaping purchase intentions (Lee et al., 2019). Utilizing memes as a marketing tool allows companies to convey pertinent information, fostering consumer engagement (Malodia et al., 2022). This innovative approach provides a platform for brands and consumers to interact seamlessly, overcoming the limitations of time, place, and communication barriers (Shifman, 2013). Moreover, it serves as a means for brands to organically go viral (Kao et al., 2020). Despite the increasing prevalence of meme marketing, there is a noticeable lack of empirical evidence (Taecharunroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). Most studies are qualitative, case studies, or subjective (Brubaker et al., 2018; Chuah et al., 2020). Scholars need to shift their focus to more quantitative and statistical studies in meme marketing. Cultivating a strong presence within the realm of meme marketing not only nurtures consumer trust (Veerasingam & Labuschagne, 2014) but also significantly influences purchase intentions. In summary, the prevalence of meme marketing highlights its essential role in contemporary business environments. Organizations recognize that an active engagement on platforms centered around memes is crucial for gaining consumer engagement and instigating purchase intentions in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Memes have assumed a pivotal role in contemporary marketing communication, notably recognized as an unequivocal means of engaging with the target demographic. To fully comprehend this phenomenon, it is imperative to understand what constitutes a meme. Shifman (2013) and Taecharunroj and Nueangjamnong (2015) emphasize that memes represent digital entities replicating and circulating from one individual to another. Notably, in 1976, Dawkins delineated three fundamental attributes of memes: fidelity (replication through copying), fecundity (rapid transmission), and longevity (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Davis, 2017). Further research has introduced additional vital traits of memes, such as uniqueness and peculiarity (Brubaker et al., 2018) and a distinct comic stance (Sharma, 2018; Taecharunroj & Nueangjamnong, 2015). In a nutshell, memes refer to information that replicates and spreads, with or without mutations, through various means and in multiple forms (Castaño Díaz, 2013).

The popularity of memes shared online is evident. According to Tama (2018), a notable 60% of the three million online media users regularly share humorous posts in the form of memes. These digital entities facilitate interactions between brands and consumers, substantially influ-

encing consumer purchase intentions. It is worth noting that memes enjoy widespread consumption online, particularly among individuals aged 13-35, a demographic particularly enamored with them YPulse (2019). As per YPulse (2019), 55% of individuals within this age bracket share memes weekly, with 30% engaging in this practice daily. Moreover, video memes have garnered remarkable popularity, representing 35.8% of all shared videos on the internet worldwide (Statista, 2023). Given the implications of this data for brand managers, marketers, and digital creators, the strategic integration of meme marketing into advertising strategies becomes a critical consideration.

Leveraging memes in advertising and marketing brings about a range of notable advantages, as elucidated by Bury (2016) and Williams (2000). Firstly, campaigns rooted in memes exhibit exceptional cost-effectiveness compared to traditional or alternative digital advertising methods. Secondly, utilizing popular existing memes simplifies the process of audience connection with the advertisement or campaign's context. Furthermore, thanks to memes' broad acceptance and communicability, marketers can naturally foster relationships with their target audiences. Also, creating memes is a straightforward process that involves the modification of existing meme templates (Malodia et al., 2022).

The utilization of memes as a marketing tool on social media platforms has grown by multiple folds. Studies have suggested that meme marketing enhances consumer engagement (Malodia et al., 2022). Lee et al. (2019) found that Internet memes or memes shared online on any social media platform effectively capture consumers' attention by integrating clever content with timely events. Surprisingly, consumers have shown greater interest in marketing through internet memes than in actual advertisements. Studies have shown that memes can also affect consumer's attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions (Vasile et al., 2021). The reason is that marketing through memes transcends traditional unidirectional communication by actively engaging consumers as participants rather than passive spectators, as discussed by Kozinets et al. (2008), Merz et al. (2009), and Kim and Ko (2012).

Brands increasingly employ memes as a strategic means of enhancing brand engagement and goodwill. Heinz, JCB Excavators Ltd., and Gucci are notable examples of brands that have harnessed memes to generate substantial publicity and establish a rapport with their audiences on social media platforms. These campaigns have garnered millions of impressions and thousands of engagements, likes, and comments, clearly highlighting the capacity of memes to capture consumer attention and enhance engagement (Malodia et al., 2022).

The allure of memes for online users can be expounded through the lenses of the social cognitive theory and the user and gratification theory. The social cognitive theory posits that individuals acquire understanding and behavioral patterns by observing their peers within their social milieu. In the context of memes, individuals are more inclined to embrace and engage with memes when they witness others doing the same, especially if they perceive these memes as influential or personally relatable, as noted by Das (2023).

Conversely, the user and gratification theory (UGT) suggests that consumers actively select media platforms based on their objectives and requirements rather than passively being influenced by the media. This theory contends that people seek out media that cater to their needs and pro-

vide gratification, resulting in recurrent utilization of these media sources (Cahya & Triputra, 2017). Originally conceived by Katz and Blumler (1974) for analyzing consumer behavior in traditional media, the UGT has been adapted to encompass the realm of social media studies, especially in light of the expansive influence of the internet. Research has consistently demonstrated that memes can establish a meaningful connection with prospective customers and influence their behavior by aligning with their objectives and requirements, as articulated by Das (2023). Individuals engage with memes because they find them entertaining, informative, or fulfilling specific life purposes.

The primary goal of any business is to impact consumer buying behavior naturally, leading them to transition from potential leads to actual sales. Meme marketing plays a pivotal role in creatively and organically engaging with consumers, ultimately affecting their purchasing decisions. The interplay among meme-based marketing, consumer engagement, and consumer purchase intention presents a crucial area for investigation. Businesses are acutely aware of the necessity to engage consumers effectively and influence their purchase intentions favorably. Meme marketing has the potential to serve as a contemporary catalyst, fostering consumer engagement and subsequently exerting an influence on consumer purchase intentions.

Understanding consumer purchase intentions is essential in the contemporary era of rapid technological advancement, as it enables businesses to stay competitive on a global scale (Bolos et al., 2016). Consumer purchase intention, particularly within promotion, sales, and branding, is widely accepted as the decision-making phase where consumers express their inclination to purchase a specific product or service (Wells et al., 2011). Factors such as identified values (Shaharudin et al., 2010), consumer attitudes (Hidayat & Diwasasri, 2013), perceived risks, functionality, and adequacy (Faqih, 2013) have been identified as variables related to consumer purchase intentions in different research contexts. Analyzing consumer behavior through their purchase intentions in meme marketing gives market researchers valuable insights into consumer trends and preferences (Ling et al., 2010).

It is noteworthy that exerting control over customers' purchasing intentions is challenging, as these intentions are constantly in flux, driven by immediate needs (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). Moreover, consumers increasingly rely on social media platforms for information and actively seek other customers' opinions before purchasing (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014). Consequently, social media marketing has become an indispensable means of capturing consumer attention and influencing their preferences.

Companies are leveraging social media platforms to reach their customers more effectively than ever (Keller, 2008; Kotler & Keller, 2011). Businesses are continually seeking new methods to enhance their profits. One such method is meme marketing, allowing companies to improve consumer engagement (Malodia et al., 2022). Consumer engagement is a pivotal factor, affording businesses many advantages, including heightened sales figures, cultivating a robust customer base, establishing effective relationships, and facilitating a powerful feedback mechanism. These benefits confer a crucial competitive advantage, indispensable for thriving in the continually evolving business landscape (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Consumer engagement is defined as the extent of a consumer's presence, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional dimensions, during their interaction with a brand or organization (Vivek et al., 2012). While it may appear analogous to consumer involvement, a distinction lies in the fact that consumer engagement transcends mere participation by incorporating a dynamic relationship with the brand, satisfying both exploratory and instrumental value aspects (Mollen & Wilson, 2010).

Businesses must provide relevant information through social media activities to encourage voluntary participation from consumers. Marketers aspire to achieve customer engagement, which has been shown to increase by 78% when the media promotes products (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Customer engagement is deemed the ultimate goal of media, as it enhances the likelihood of consumers intending to purchase products and services when they actively participate in the process. According to Boyer and Hult's (2006) research on consumer behavioral intentions for online purchases, customer engagement significantly impacts purchase intentions.

However, it is paramount to acknowledge the extant limitations in ongoing research concerning memes' effectiveness and enduring impact on marketing. A need for more comprehensive investigation prevails, necessitating further scholarly inquiry to unravel the nuances of harnessing customer engagement and, ultimately, attaining the marketing objective of stimulating consumer purchase intentions (Williams, 2000; Bury, 2016). While individual studies have separately elucidated the associations between meme marketing and consumer engagement (Malodia et al., 2022) and meme marketing and consumer purchase behavior (Lee et al., 2019), a more comprehensive empirical analysis is warranted to comprehend the intricate dynamics linking these three equally vital variables in the context of business operations. Despite some progress in understanding the relationship between meme marketing and consumer purchase intentions, the factors facilitating this relationship remain poorly comprehended or considered (Vasile et al., 2021).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the impact of Internet memes used as a marketing

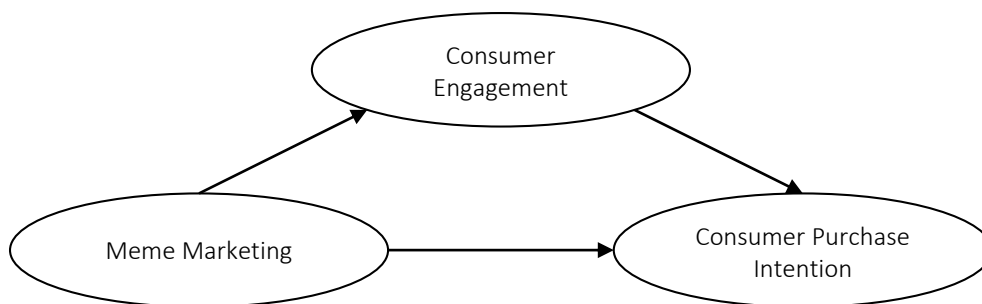


Figure 1. Conceptual model

tool on social media platforms on consumers' purchase intentions, mediated by consumer engagement. Therefore, this study examines the hypotheses formulated following an extensive literature review (see Figure 1 for a visual representation of these hypotheses):

- H1: *Meme marketing has a direct and significant influence on consumer engagement.*
- H2: *Consumer engagement has a direct and significant influence on consumer purchase intention.*
- H3: *Consumer engagement has a mediation (full/partial) effect on the relationship between meme marketing and consumer purchase intention.*

2. METHOD

The study utilized a quantitative research methodology, employing a questionnaire to collect primary data. When using a purposive sampling technique, multiple factors were considered in the selection process. Participation in the survey was restricted to individuals possessing an active social media account and falling within the age cohorts of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996), or Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2010). Geographically, the questionnaire was limited to Indian residents having an online presence on any social media platform. As per the most recent survey data, India had approximately 470.1 million active social media users who logged in at least once a month in 2022 (Oosga, 2023). An essential factor considered was the sample size, which aligned with established research methodologies (Yin, 2018). The sample size was based on established research recommendations (Abranovic, 1997; Sekaran, 2003). As per Cochran (2007), when determining the sample size at a 95% confidence level with a margin of error set at 0.05, the calculated sample size is 384, and there is no need for a correction formula. 500 questionnaires were distributed through various online channels encompassing online platforms to enhance both reach and response rates. To uphold data quality standards, incom-

plete questionnaires were omitted from the study, yielding a final sample size of 452 fully completed questionnaires.

Assurances were in place to maintain the confidentiality of respondents' answers. Participants were required to provide their consent before proceeding to completing the questionnaire. Before commencing the survey, participants were presented with comprehensive instructions on the questionnaire homepage. The first two questions were designed to screen out individuals who lacked familiarity with memes and marketing strategies involving memes. The implementation of these filtering questions allowed the study to pinpoint a subset of participants who possessed a sufficient understanding of the utilization of memes in marketing.

The questions in the questionnaire were developed from previous investigations and can be found in Appendix A. The measurement indicator for the construct of meme marketing activities was taken from Bilgin (2018), Sharma et al. (2021), and Yadav and Rahman (2018). It focused on the deployment of internet memes as marketing tools on various online forums and sites. The construct of consumer purchase intention and consumer engagement was taken from a study by Husnain and Toor (2017). All indicators were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale spans from strongly disagree to strongly agree, where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree.

Precautions were implemented to mitigate the impact of common method bias. The anonymity of the respondents was ensured to discourage biased responses. The questions were presented using a user-friendly scale for straightforward comprehension.

Furthermore, the questionnaire items used had gone through face validity, where two experts from the marketing industry and two subject experts from academia were asked to give their suggestions on the appearance, content, and cohesiveness of the questionnaire. To ensure the questionnaire's clarity and ease of comprehension, feedback on language and grammar was solicited from a faculty members specializing in English. Since the questionnaire was presented in English, their insights proved particularly valuable.

The structural equation modeling (SEM) method was deployed for statistics analysis. Analysis of moment structures (AMOS) 20.0 Program was used to perform data analysis using SEM. SEM involves hypothesizing the linear relationships between observed and unobserved variables. It describes the connections among several variables through a series of expressions analogous to expressions of multiple regression. These expressions illustrate the association between dependent and independent constructs (Musil et al., 1998). Mediation was analyzed through regression coefficients of the variables involved. Mediation involves the consideration of an intermediate variable, known as the mediator, which helps describe the mechanism or reason behind the influence of an independent variable on an outcome (James & Brett, 1984).

It is necessary to consider the derivative effect by assessing the association between the independent, mediator, and dependent variables. This involves multiplying the standardized regression weights for both paths. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), who built upon the work of Sobel (1982), the indirect effect should be more than the direct effect to demonstrate mediation in a structural modeling context. This means any value associated with the mediator variable should be larger than the causal effect. To establish the occurrence of a mediation effect, the probability value (p-value) should be significant ($p < 0.05$), or the confidence interval should be 95%. If either or both of the paths are deemed to be insignificant, it indicates that there is no mediation effect.

3. RESULTS

The statistical profile of the entire cohort comprising 452 participants is outlined in Table 1. The distribution indicates that 49.1% of respondents were male, while 50.9% were female. Moreover, participants were classified into three generations across diverse age groups. The breakdown is as follows: 7.1% belonged to Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), 57.3% belonged to Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996), and 35.6% belonged to Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2010).

Furthermore, information about the participants' occupations was gathered. Of the respondents,

18.58% were self-employed, 55.97% were employed in the private sector, 2.66% were engaged in public sector or government positions, 11.06% were students, and the remaining 11.73% identified as homemakers.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic data

| Description | Total | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 222 | 49.1 |
| Female | 230 | 50.9 |
| Age | | |
| Generation X | 32 | 7.1 |
| Generation Y | 259 | 57.3 |
| Generation Z | 161 | 35.6 |
| Occupation | | |
| Self Employed | 84 | 18.58 |
| Private Sector | 253 | 55.97 |
| Public Sector | 12 | 2.66 |
| Student | 50 | 11.06 |
| Homemaker | 53 | 11.73 |

Meme marketing, being a latent variable, was measured through sub-dimensions, namely entertainment quotient, interactiveness, trendiness, information, and e-word of mouth. When looking at the reliability of various sub-dimensions in meme marketing activities, Table 2 shows that the entertainment sub-construct has a composite reliability value of 0.865 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.865. Similarly, the interaction sub-construct has a composite reliability, also known as construct reliability, of 0.768 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.770. The trendiness sub-construct has a construct reliability of 0.732 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.732. The informative sub-construct has a construct reliability of 0.829 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.830. Finally, the e-word of mouth sub-construct has a composite reliability of 0.859 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.860. Overall, most of the constructs have higher reliability values than required. A widely agreed-upon guideline is that a reliability coefficient ranging from 0.6-0.7 is considered acceptable, while a coefficient of 0.8 or higher is considered optimal (Ursachi et al., 2015). It should be noted that values exceeding 0.95 may not necessarily indicate quality, as they might suggest redundancies (Hulin et al., 2001). Also, according to Pervan et al. (2018), the average variance extracted (AVE) in the analysis ought to be greater than 0.5 to meet the minimum threshold. However, they also suggest that if the AVE in the analysis is less

Table 2. Reliability and item loadings of variables

| Latent Variable | Indicators | Standardized loading (β) | Composite Reliability | Cronbach Alpha | Average Variance Extracted(AVE) |
|--|--------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Entertainment (MMA_ENT) | MMA_ENT_1 | 0.793 | 0.865 | 0.865 | 0.682 |
| | MMA_ENT_2 | 0.815 | | | |
| | MMA_ENT_3 | 0.868 | | | |
| Interaction (MIMA_INTE) | MIMA_INTE_1 | 0.636 | 0.768 | 0.770 | 0.527 |
| | MIMA_INTE_2 | 0.774 | | | |
| | MIMA_INTE_3 | 0.760 | | | |
| Trendiness (MIMA_TRND) | MIMA_TRND_1 | 0.673 | 0.732 | 0.732 | 0.477 |
| | MIMA_TRND_2 | 0.666 | | | |
| | MIMA_TRND_3 | 0.732 | | | |
| Informative (MIMA_INFO) | MIMA_INFO_1 | 0.684 | 0.829 | 0.830 | 0.620 |
| | MIMA_INFO_2 | 0.843 | | | |
| | MIMA_INFO_3 | 0.826 | | | |
| E-Word of Mouth (MIMA_E_MTH) | MIMA_E_MTH_1 | 0.710 | 0.859 | 0.860 | 0.672 |
| | MIMA_E_MTH_2 | 0.902 | | | |
| | MIMA_E_MTH_3 | 0.836 | | | |
| Consumer Engagement (CON_ENG) | CON_ENG_1 | 0.773 | 0.855 | 0.856 | 0.597 |
| | CON_ENG_2 | 0.693 | | | |
| | CON_ENG_3 | 0.813 | | | |
| | CON_ENG_4 | 0.807 | | | |
| Consumer Purchase Intention (CON_PINT) | CON_PINT_1 | 0.833 | 0.870 | 0.870 | 0.691 |
| | CON_PINT_2 | 0.792 | | | |
| | CON_PINT_3 | 0.867 | | | |

than 0.5, but the composite reliability is more than 0.6, the construct still has adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variance extracted for the trendiness sub-construct is lower than 0.5, but the composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha values are above 0.7. Hence, it meets the criteria. Therefore, all the items in the respective sub-dimensions converge well.

The consumer engagement construct has a composite reliability value of 0.855 and a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.856. Similarly, the consumer purchase intention construct has a composite reliability of 0.870 and a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.870. The results indicate that the reliability of most constructs exceeds the required threshold of 0.70. Therefore, all items in each construct converge well with their respective sub-dimensions.

These findings indicate that all the sub-constructs meet the required reliability standards. This suggests that all the items within each sub-dimension

align well. Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha values for each dimension are higher than 0.70, exceeding the required threshold. This highlights the consistency of the data and the appropriateness of the respondents involved.

Before SEM (mediation) analysis, the data are subjected to normality, collinearity, and auto-correlation tests, which are necessary assumptions of the SEM model. Table 3 presents the normality and collinearity test results for each item in consideration.

To ascertain if the statistics show a normal distribution, the asymmetry and kurtosis values should be between -2 and +2 (George & Mallery, 2010). According to Table 3, all the items within the dimensions of meme marketing activities, consumer engagement, and consumer purchase intention meet this requirement. Moreover, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for every item is below the recommended value of 5, indicating low collinearity and no inflated variance (Menard, 2002). All

Table 3. Normality and collinearity test results by item wise for data

| Item Label | Normality test | | Collinearity and Autocorrelation Statistics | | | |
|--|----------------|----------|---|-------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| | Skewness | Kurtosis | Tolerance | VIF | Condition Indices | Durbin-Watson Statistics |
| For MEME MARKETING ACTIVITIES | | | | | | |
| Entertainment | | | | | | |
| MMA_ENT_1 | -0.476 | -0.215 | 0.488 | 2.050 | 15.562 | 1.990 |
| MMA_ENT_2 | -0.620 | 0.696 | 0.474 | 2.109 | 19.966 | |
| MMA_ENT_3 | -0.473 | 0.203 | 0.481 | 2.077 | 20.529 | |
| Interaction | | | | | | |
| MIMA_INTE_1 | -0.753 | 0.516 | 0.728 | 1.374 | 11.489 | 1.955 |
| MIMA_INTE_2 | -0.664 | -0.028 | 0.602 | 1.660 | 14.167 | |
| MIMA_INTE_3 | -0.683 | 0.229 | 0.612 | 1.634 | 15.434 | |
| Trendiness | | | | | | |
| MIMA_TRND_1 | -0.624 | -0.049 | 0.757 | 1.321 | 11.580 | 1.972 |
| MIMA_TRND_2 | -0.773 | 0.449 | 0.674 | 1.484 | 13.282 | |
| MIMA_TRND_3 | -0.582 | -0.119 | 0.672 | 1.489 | 16.933 | |
| Informative | | | | | | |
| MIMA_INFO_1 | -0.508 | -0.015 | 0.757 | 1.321 | 11.580 | 1.971 |
| MIMA_INFO_2 | -0.241 | -0.663 | 0.674 | 1.484 | 13.282 | |
| MIMA_INFO_3 | -0.233 | -0.425 | 0.672 | 1.489 | 16.933 | |
| E-Word of Mouth | | | | | | |
| MIMA_E_MTH_1 | -0.544 | -0.159 | 0.533 | 1.875 | 9.650 | 2.088 |
| MIMA_E_MTH_2 | -0.490 | -0.173 | 0.323 | 3.098 | 11.789 | |
| MIMA_E_MTH_3 | -0.336 | -0.563 | 0.345 | 2.898 | 17.239 | |
| For CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT | | | | | | |
| CON_ENG_1 | -0.338 | -0.665 | 0.488 | 2.050 | 8.455 | 1.968 |
| CON_ENG_2 | -0.586 | 0.219 | 0.535 | 1.870 | 11.842 | |
| CON_ENG_3 | -0.659 | 0.015 | 0.438 | 2.282 | 13.719 | |
| CON_ENG_4 | 0.012 | -0.84 | 0.503 | 1.989 | 15.296 | |
| For CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION | | | | | | |
| CON_PINT_1 | -0.421 | -0.327 | 0.429 | 2.332 | 9.016 | 2.016 |
| CON_PINT_2 | -0.708 | 0.476 | 0.464 | 2.156 | 12.915 | |
| CON_PINT_3 | -0.308 | -0.333 | 0.408 | 2.449 | 14.001 | |

the items are on par with the VIF recommended threshold. The Durbin-Watson figures for all items also fall within an acceptable range of normality (Field, 2005). If the value of Durbin-Watson is below one or above three, it is concerning according to a conservative guideline. The closer it is to two, the more desirable it is (Mustapha & Aris, 2012). With these assumptions met, the study can proceed with the SEM analysis.

From the regression result in Table 4 and Figure 2, H1 could be fully asserted: meme as a marketing

activity that directly influences consumer engagement. The explanation is that if the rating scale of agreement on the meme marketing construct increases by one unit, consumer engagement is expected to increase by approximately 74%, assuming all other factors remain constant.

From the regression result in Table 4 and Figure 3, H2 can be fully asserted: if the rating scale for consumer engagement increases by one unit, you can expect a roughly 84% increase in consumer purchase intention, assuming everything else remains constant.

Table 4. Standardized regression weights for a direct relationship

| Relationship | Standard Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---|-------------------|-------|--------|--------|
| Consumer Engagement ← Meme Marketing | 0.740 | 0.090 | 13.827 | 0.000* |
| Consumer Purchase Intention ← Consumer Engagement | 0.842 | 0.049 | 16.504 | 0.000* |

Note: * Significant at 5% level.

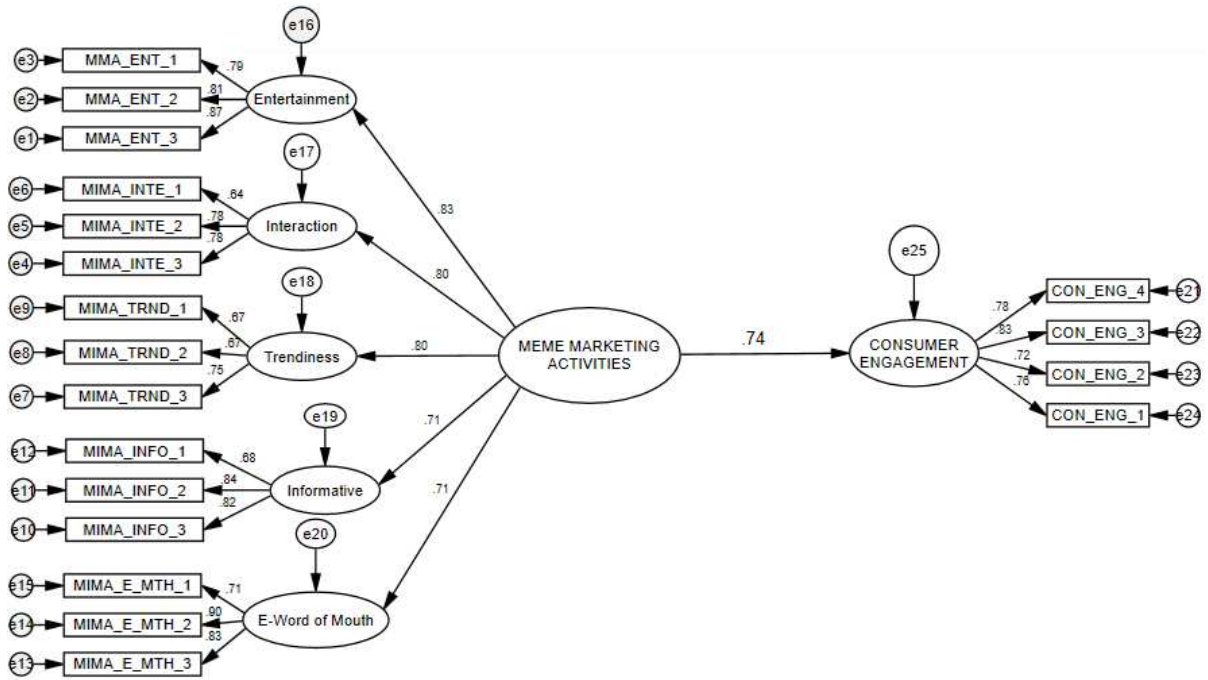


Figure 2. Direct relationship between meme as a marketing activity and consumer engagement

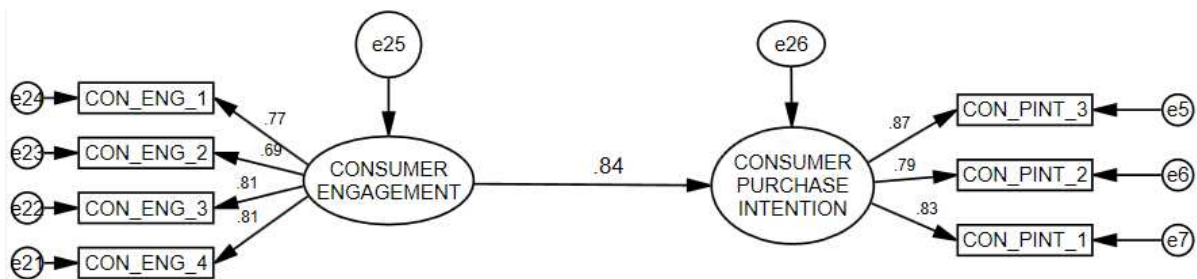


Figure 3. Direct relationship between consumer engagement and consumer purchase intention

For mediation analysis, the study analyzes the role of an intermediate variable, known as the mediator, in explaining how or why an independent variable affects an outcome. Here, the variable consumer engagement is the mediator, and meme marketing is the independent variable that may or may not affect consumer purchase intention.

The regression coefficient of the direct effect of meme marketing activities on consumer engagement is 0.745, which is statistically significant (p-value = 0.006, $p < 0.05$) (see Table 5). Similarly, the path coefficient from meme marketing activities to consumer purchase intention is 0.257 and also found to be significant (p-value = 0.007, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5. Test for mediation effect of consumer engagement between meme marketing and consumer purchase intention

| Path | β | Boot S.E | Boot LLCL | Boot ULCL | p-value |
|--|---------|----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Meme marketing activities → Consumer engagement | 0.745 | 0.034 | 0.677 | 0.813 | 0.006* |
| Consumer engagement → Consumer purchase intention | 0.651 | 0.073 | 0.499 | 0.798 | 0.010* |
| Meme marketing activities → Consumer purchase intention (Indirect) | 0.485 | 0.062 | 0.390 | 0.638 | 0.007* |
| Meme marketing activities → Consumer purchase intention (Direct) | 0.257 | 0.075 | 0.110 | 0.414 | 0.007* |
| Total | 0.742 | 0.034 | 0.670 | 0.810 | 0.009* |

Note: * Significant at 5% level. Bootstrap samples =2000 and confidence level = 95 %.

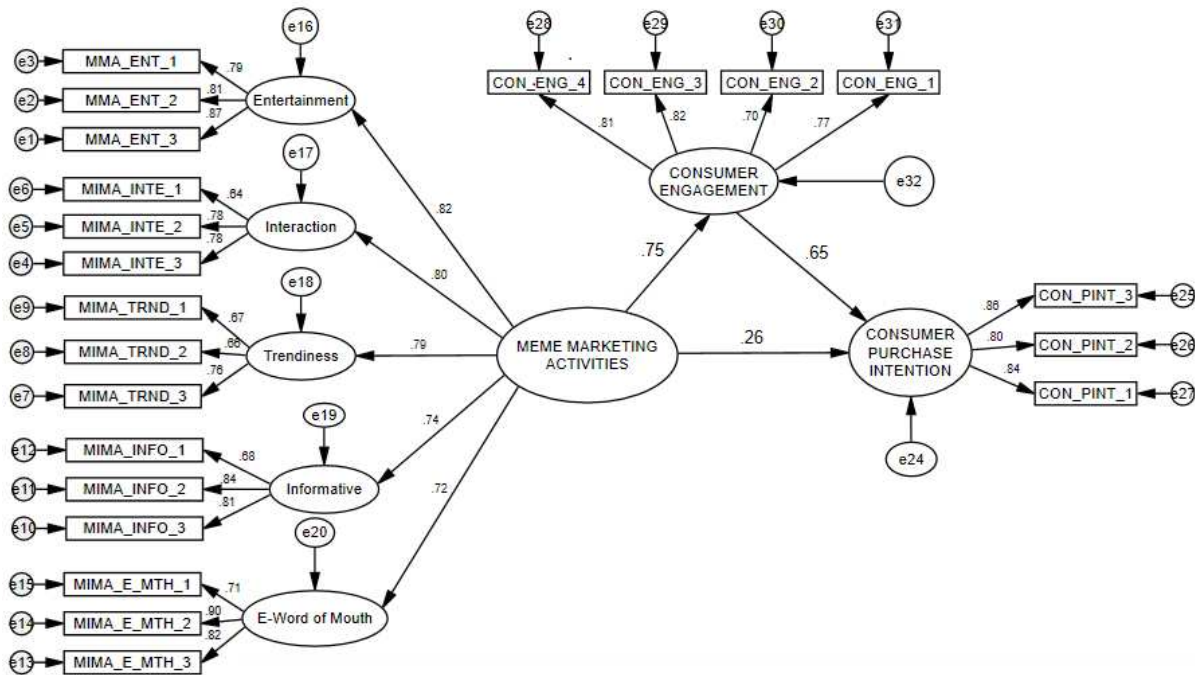


Figure 4. Mediation of consumer engagement between meme marketing and consumer purchase intention

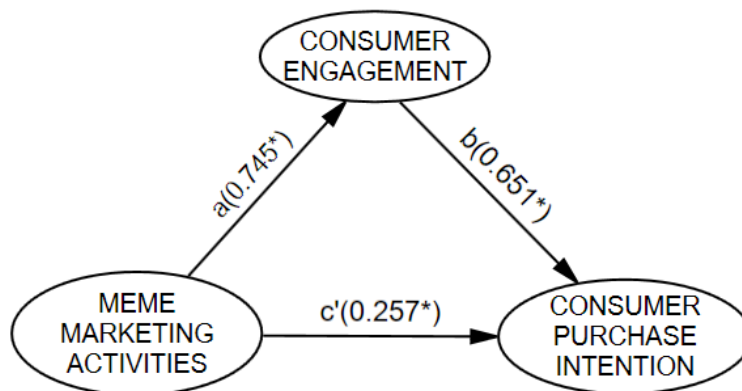


Figure 5. Mediation of consumer engagement between meme marketing and consumer purchase intention

Additionally, the direct effect of consumer engagement on consumer purchase intention has a coefficient of 0.651 and is statistically significant (p -value = 0.010, $p < 0.05$). The indirect impact of meme marketing activities on consumer purchase intention through consumer engagement is 0.485 (0.745×0.651) and is also statistically significant

(p -value = 0.007, $p < 0.05$) using bootstrapping (Table 5). Therefore, Table 5, Figure 4, and Figure 5 conclude that partial mediation occurs when consumer engagement mediates between meme marketing activities and consumer purchase intention. Hence, H3 is supported. In summary, statistical evidence suggests that consumer engagement par-

Table 6. Summary of the results of all the hypotheses

| Hypothesis | Conclusion |
|--|------------|
| H1: Memes marketing activity has a direct and significant influence on consumer engagement | Supported |
| H2: Consumer engagement has a direct and significant influence on consumer purchase intention | Supported |
| H3: Consumer engagement has a mediation (full/partial) effect between meme as a marketing activity and consumer purchase intention | Supported |

tially strengthens the relationship between meme marketing activities and consumer purchase intention (Figure 4 and Figure 5). Table 6 summarizes the results of this study.

4. DISCUSSION

This study's findings highlight the favorable impact of meme marketing on consumer engagement, shedding light on the factors contributing to effective consumer engagement. Meme content needs to exhibit characteristics such as entertainment, interactivity, and relevance to current trends (Sharma, 2018). This assertion aligns with the user and gratification theory, which posits that internet memes function as tools for self-expression, fostering social and communal bonds, serving entertainment purposes, and disseminating information (Cahya & Triputra, 2017), all contributing to heightened engagement.

Effective meme content should also be able to propagate through oral channels and capture consumers' attention by imparting information and addressing their need for social acceptance. This perspective is further corroborated by the social cognitive theory, which underscores the significance of observational learning and imitation in the learning process (Das, 2023). Consequently, businesses are encouraged to incorporate memes into their marketing strategies to craft engaging content that bolsters consumer engagement and draws the attention of potential customers. Memes play a pivotal role in forging an emotional connection between companies and potential customers by associating the brand with humor and relatable content (Teng et al., 2022). Marketers should thus consider the creation of memes that resonate with their target audience and assess the effectiveness of meme-driven marketing initiatives. By analyzing consumer responses, businesses can refine their strategies to enhance engagement (Malodia et al., 2022). These findings are substantiated by Nanayakkara and Liyanage (2021), Vasile et al.

(2021), and Malodia et al. (2022), all of whom posit a positive correlation between meme marketing and consumer engagement.

Moreover, the empirical data affirm the positive association between consumer engagement and purchase intention. These findings concur with those reported by Rosetta (2014), corroborating the link between consumer engagement and purchase intention. Engaged consumers demonstrate high brand loyalty, even in the face of negative experiences, as they endeavor to cultivate stronger affiliations with brands. Furthermore, it has been established that emotional attachment to a brand, preceding consumer engagement, significantly influences purchase behavior (Husnain & Toor, 2017).

In accordance with H3, which establishes a direct influence of meme marketing activities on consumer purchase intention, similar observations have been made in studies by Lee et al. (2019) and Vasile et al. (2021). Furthermore, this study uncovers a noteworthy indirect impact of meme marketing on consumer purchase intentions mediated by consumer engagement, indicating partial mediation. There is compelling evidence supporting the partial mediating role of consumer engagement in the connection between meme marketing activities and consumer purchase intention.

According to the findings of this study, to enhance their marketing strategies, it is imperative for marketers to consistently adjust their digital marketing tactics to harmonize with the ever-changing preferences of consumers. Prioritizing the creation of engaging memes that strike a chord with social media consumers is of utmost importance, as the digital realm of memes provides an unrestricted and direct channel for communication. Embracing the adaptability of memes can empower marketers to guide consumer interactions in accordance with their organizational goals, simultaneously cultivating a more profound insight into consumer expectations and intentions.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between meme marketing activities and consumer purchase intentions in the presence of consumer engagement as a mediator. The study analysis

has shown that meme marketing activities impact consumer engagement positively and significantly. Consumer engagement also has a positive and significant impact on consumer purchase intentions. However, meme marketing and consumer purchase intentions have an evident positive relation, leading to partial mediation of consumer engagement. Based on the findings, this paper underscores the crucial role of consumer engagement in augmenting purchase intentions. It emphasizes the need for brand managers and companies to judiciously implement meme marketing strategies to maximize customer engagement benefits. Marketers should consider providing supplementary information through reciprocal meme posts and establishing dedicated platforms for interactive two-way communication where consumers can share their experiences and opinions using memes, thereby aiding others in making informed purchasing decisions. This strategic approach facilitates the acquisition of valuable insights into the consumption patterns of online social media users, which, in turn, can be leveraged to refine marketing plans and strategies. Consequently, marketers must remain attentive to the escalating significance of memes and meme-based marketing on social networking platforms, recognizing their potential to impact and shape consumer purchase decisions.

Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations. The potential for bias exists due to the reliance on self-reported data, which can result in common response patterns. However, extensive efforts were made to mitigate this bias through carefully designing and administering the survey. Additionally, the study exclusively employed closed-ended questions in the survey, and future research may benefit from incorporating interviews to gain a deeper understanding of social media users and their perspectives. Furthermore, marketers and companies can derive more profound insights by exploring the influence of various demographic factors on meme marketing. Lastly, future studies should investigate factors beyond consumer engagement, such as brand equity.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Navrang Rathi.

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Formal analysis: Navrang Rathi.

Investigation: Navrang Rathi.

Methodology: Navrang Rathi.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Questionnaire

| No. | Particulars | Question |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|
| | | Filtering questions |
| 1 | | Are you aware of the concept of memes? Yes/No |
| 2 | | Are you aware of the marketing done by brands through memes? Yes/No |
| | | 5 point Likert Scale questions (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) |
| | | For Meme marketing activities |
| 1 | | The use of memes by various brands is enjoyable. |
| 2 | Entertainment | The memes shared/created by social media of brands are enjoyable. |
| 3 | | The memes shared/created by social media of brands are interesting. |
| 4 | | Information sharing is possible through memes created/shared by the brand. |
| 5 | Interaction | Discussion and exchange of opinion are possible through memes created/shared by the brand. |
| 6 | | The expression of opinions is easy through the memes-based content of the brand. |
| 7 | Trendiness | Information shared through memes by the brand is up-to-date/newest. |
| 8 | | The use of meme-based content by the brands is trendy. |
| 9 | | Anything trendy is available on the meme-based content of the brands. |
| 10 | Informative | Memes created/shared by the brand provide useful information on the products/services. |
| 11 | | Memes created/ shared by the brands are comprehensive (provide complete information). |
| 12 | | Memes created/shared by the brand provide accurate information on the products/services. |
| 13 | E-word of mouth | I share meme-based content on brands with my friends and family. |
| 14 | | I would recommend my friends and family to visit meme-based brand content. |
| 15 | | I encourage my friends and family to use/share meme-based content of brands. |
| | | For Consumer Engagement |
| 16 | Consumer engagement | I often visit meme pages of brands I follow on social networking sites. |
| 17 | | I read memes by the brands I follow on social networking sites. |
| 18 | | I use the "Like" option on brand-related memes I follow on social media. |
| 19 | | I comment on the memes shared by the brands on social networking sites. |
| | | For Consumer Purchase Intention |
| 20 | Consumer purchase intention | Memes shared/created by the brands help me make better decisions before purchasing any good or service. |
| 21 | | Watching brand-related memes increases my interest in buying products and services from that brand. |
| 22 | | I will buy products or services marketed through memes of the brands I follow. |